

News from Ed Markey

United States Congress

Massachusetts Seventh District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 28, 2001

CONTACT: Israel Klein

(202) 225-2836

MARKEY LETTER TO NRC QUESTIONS CONSEQUENCES OF PLANE CRASH AT NUCLEAR REACTOR

Impact on Unprotected Auxiliary Reactor Cooling and Electrical Facilities Could Cause Core Nuclear Meltdown

WASHINGTON, D.C. --

Rep. Edward Markey (D-MA), a senior Member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee and co-chairman of the Bipartisan Task Force on Nonproliferation, today released a letter to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) regarding the possible consequences of a terrorist attack on a nuclear reactor using a large commercial aircraft. "The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has provided inconsistent, inaccurate and conflicting information to the public regarding the ability of nuclear reactor containment structures to withstand the impact of a large commercial airliner," said Rep. Markey. "Moreover, NRC documents I have examined conclude that a core meltdown at a nuclear reactor could occur even if the aircraft hit the reactor's auxiliary electrical or cooling facilities rather than the containment structure itself. The NRC needs to take immediate steps to properly and completely assess this risk, and take all necessary steps to protect against it." Immediately following the September 11 attacks, representatives from both the NRC and the nuclear industry made numerous public statements claiming that nuclear reactor containment structures could withstand the impact of a large commercial aircraft. Then, on September 21, the NRC issued a press release that contradicted its initial position, stating that "the NRC did not specifically contemplate attacks by aircraft such as Boeing 757s and Boeing 767s and nuclear power plants were not designed to withstand such crashes. Detailed engineering analyses of a large airliner crash have not yet been performed." Shortly thereafter, however, a detailed engineering analysis of a large airliner crash into a nuclear reactor conducted in 1982 for the NRC by Argonne National Laboratory was found in NRC's public reading room. The Argonne study concludes that: · An attack that eliminated the plant's offsite power could make the nuclear reactor vulnerable to a core meltdown and release of radioactive materials into the environment. · An attack that caused the secondary cooling system of the reactor as well as the external power to fail could result in a re-criticality of the core, even if the containment structure of the reactor wasn't penetrated at all. Such an attack could lead to a core meltdown and release of radioactive materials into the environment. · Many of the auxiliary electrical and cooling facilities of a nuclear reactor are not protected inside hardened structures. "A core meltdown at a nuclear reactor could release enough radioactivity to threaten the health and safety of people in nearby communities and render them uninhabitable for years. The NRC must take steps to protect ALL nuclear reactor facilities from terrorist attacks," said Rep. Markey. For all correspondence on this issue, please refer to our website, www.house.gov/markey

###